

MT. KENYA HIKE

1ST TO 3RD SEPTEMBER 2023-CHOGORIA-SIRIMON ROUTE

Day Before-31st August 2023

This was a very busy day at work. I got home at 8:30pm. I had not packed and packing last minute is dangerous. My husband Walter and I had to pack and prepare to leave home by 4:30am to be in town for departure by 5:00am the next day. The only solution was an elaborate packing list. I wrote it with the following categories: head, upper body, lower body, foot wear and personal effects. I really wanted to make sure we did not forget anything since the cold is not something I want to toy with. And of course, we know there are no shops up there, what you carried is what you use. The packing list really helped. We packed everything we needed. Alarms were set and clothes to be worn the following morning laid out.

This story is meant for anyone who plans to hike Mt. Kenya and anyone else who wants to read of the three-day fantastic experience.

Day 1: 1st September 2023 Bandas Camp/Chogoria Gate to Lake Ellis

The alarm rang at 3:30 am but because of body fatigue I snoozed so we woke up at 4:00am. We were supposed to be in town by 5:00 am for departure to Nanyuki. This is where we would meet with part of the team, our Guide and Porters. We would also pick the gear we were hiring here. Hiking gear can be hired for the ones you are not able to buy. The full hiking gear is quite an investment so don't bother buying everything if you have never hiked before. Build it up with time until you own the most crucial items. I had intended to take breakfast but this was ruled out due to time. After all, our itinerary said that we would have breakfast in Chogoria town and that was fair enough for me. We would be using the Chogoria route that is considered the most scenic on the mountain. It has no huts and requires hikers to be self-sufficient for camping.

We were ready to leave the house by around 4:50am. We got to town to find Shirleen patiently waiting for us at the stage. We boarded a matatu and left by 5:30am. My mind was racing all over and I could not imagine that the day was finally here. We had really planned and invested for it. Personally, I was mostly invested emotionally. Hiking Mt. Kenya was simply a childhood dream. Having grown up in Nyeri, I would see it every morning as I walked to school.

Sometimes I would even see some snow at the peak. It always fascinated me. This was it, this was the weekend I would get to the top (hopefully). They say that the best summit is the one you come back alive and I was alive to that fact. There is no need to summit and spend the following days in a hospital ward. Due to this, I knew that if altitude sickness got me I would not force it. I still prayed to be able to summit. Symptoms of altitude sickness include lack of appetite, nausea, or vomiting, exhaustion or weakness, dizziness, insomnia, shortness of breath upon exertion, irritability, feeling sleepy, swelling of the hands, feet and face among others. In rare cases a life-threatening condition can develop. Loss of muscular control, blurred vision, hallucinations, and mental confusion are signs that warn you to seek medical help immediately and get down to a lower altitude. We were advised to communicate if we experienced any symptoms. It is also advised that you see a doctor if you have a pre-existing health condition before attempting to hike Mt. Kenya due to the low oxygen levels in high altitude. Normally when your body needs more oxygen, you automatically breathe more heavily and fill the need. So, panting will most likely be there, but speak up on any symptom experienced.

For the past 14 days we had a workout challenge and I managed to do 13 out of the 14 days despite a busy schedule. I was determined. We had also done Longonot the previous week and it went really well. It was a simple tester because, little did I know what awaited me in Mt. Kenya. I digress. The driver was really ready to take us to Nanyuki because by 8:30am we alighted in Nanyuki town. We met with Robert who was the team leader. He took us to the shop where we would meet the rest of the team as well as pick gear.

The shop is known as *MohaKin Climbing and Safaris*. They sell hiking gear and hire as well. They also do Mt. Kenya bookings. Let me introduce the team. The hiking team was made up of 6 members namely: Robert, Shirleen (Robert's wife), Leo, Bryan, Walter and I. Our guide for the hike was going to be Lawrence Muriuki AKA Mbuyu as we later learnt. We hired what we needed and left the few items that we did not need for the hike in the office. There was a ready vehicle for us but before then we bought spare batteries for the headlights in case we needed to replace. Some sweets were also bought in case we needed some energy boost before 'breakfast'. It was already 10:00am by the time we were ready to leave. My stomach had started to complain but I was too excited to focus there. The journey to Chogoria was great, knowing the other members of the team whom we had not met before, that is Leo and Bryan and sharing our

expectations. We were highly expectant of a successful hike. Shirleen and Robert had summited severally so it's the four of us who were *monos* as Leo would frequently put it. I am glad that the two did not overshare on what to expect because our morale might have dwindled. We got to Chogoria town at around noon. At this point I just wanted food. This was now a combination of breakfast and lunch or do we say brunch. But this was a tight balance since Robert informed us that we would have a light meal at Bandas camp at the Chogoria gate. That was about 23 kilometres from Chogoria town.

We got into a hotel near where our vehicle was parked. This hotel was such a joke even though it had good food. At the entrance there was a display of a menu. When I saw *ndengu* on the list I knew I would eat *chapo* and *ndengu*. Simple meal before the light one at Bandas. One good thing about the mountain is the good food. We'll come back there. We find a table for six and sit to order. The waiter, who I will call Peter for this story was somehow overwhelmed by our orders. Fear hungry people because they want to eat everything. I asked for my *chapo ndengu* and he said *ndengu* was not available. I was perplexed. His response was “*wewe umeangalia menu ya jana*”. Walter wanted fried eggs and the response was “*hiyo siwezi kupromise*”. At this point, Bryan advised that we ask for what is ready because we had 30 minutes to eat and leave Chogoria. That is what worked. Some other team members wanted to change their order and he motioned his hands to just say ‘calm down’, I know my job so to speak. He was indeed training us patience and we needed it where we were going. It's like our day had not even started. I took tea and 2 *chapos*, because yes, I was that hungry. I could not risk beef by all means since I had had a food poisoning bout in the previous week. So, it was either tea or plant-based meal. The rest of the team was fine with most taking *chapo*, beef stew and *pilau*. We were now ready to leave Chogoria. Still highly motivated and sort of wondering, when will this start.

We left for Mt. Kenya National Park, Chogoria gate. The road was dry and favourable because if it rained we were doomed with no tarmac and a vehicle heavily loaded by our supplies and us of course. We got to the first point and alighted to register and pay. This was at 2000m altitude level. The air was cool and fresh. The officer at registration asked for our national IDs as we registered. As I filled the registration book, he asked if I was ready and I told him I was very ready, excitedly. He must have smiled at heart. Back to the vehicle and we started our 21km drive to Bandas camp. The road passes through dense forest that is a combination of tall bamboo,

cedar, yellow wood and others. We were glad it had not rained. We saw a Sykes monkey along the way. We got to a steep point and we had to alight for the vehicle to move. Other teams alighted too apart from one group that decided they had not paid to walk to the gate. Their hiking experience had to officially start at the gate. Ours started way earlier because when I thought that the driver would wait for us at a distance past the steep point he drove away all the way to Bandas camp. He went with the porters and we were left with the guide. The trek for about 2kms started. It was steep. The Guide, Lawrence advised that we walk close together because elephants and buffaloes abound in the area. Robert asked what one should do if we encountered the animals. He said that one should always spot an animal first. The buffalo will way lay you if it spotted you first. The climb was getting steeper and I kept wondering how far we were from the gate where the hike would start. Anticipation is that you? I should have soaked it all in because the mountain was not going anywhere. After a few minutes we got to a place that had network because at the earlier points phone network was at zero. Two ladies were coming down from Bandas to make a call. They stood at some distance. They had seen a buffalo. Lawrence saw it too. I froze. We saw the second one and a third one with its calf. I guess they were a full herd. You should have seen me move swiftly from left to right close to where Walter was. We all stood there, jokes gone and waiting for Lawrence to guide us. He did beyond that. He made some sounds close to the barking of a dog and the buffalos turned back to some further distance. Sense of calmness engulfed the team and we continued walking. The two ladies turned back with us, because what if you mimic Lawrence's voice and the buffalos detect a fresh mountaineer. I advised if the phone call was not an emergency, they should just turn back. I tried to put myself in their shoes. Two ladies and a growing herd of buffalos and no guide. I was wowed because what would we have done if we did not have him. Run? Maybe not, my boots were heavy a good one. The over six-hour travel (Nairobi-Nanyuki-Chogoria) made me exhausted too. We knew we were in good hands. Lawrence started out as a porter in 1997. He quit the mountain job for three years but his heart came back home, the mountain. He was now an experienced guide.

We finally got to Bandas camp at around 3:00 pm. The hike was yet to start officially but we were being patient. The team that went ahead us with the vehicle had prepared a light delicious meal. When I say delicious I mean it. It really was and everyone wanted the recipe. It was *chapati* made with carrots and served with a beef stew with mixed vegetables. Served hot and tea by the side. We really enjoyed the meal. This was the beginning of spoiling with delicious meals

by the able team, the super team. Let me introduce them. They were seven, that is, Mathenge the Chef, Julius Ndereba, Desmond Mbugua, Patrick AKA Pattie, Gitonga, Agnes AKA Amazon and Mugendi. We wouldn't have had any other way. We arranged our luggage to put items in our day bags for what we would carry and others in the hiking bags for what the Porters would carry. At this point, it was very cold and a cloud was around the camp. Imagine that, being on top of a cloud. This is common in Mt. Kenya. The altitude here was 2950metres. We layered up and made sure we were warm. We also took some photos at the gate for the before hike memories. Lawrence signaled it was time to leave. It was getting late and we did not have ample time for a thorough briefing. We had a brief one on what to expect and how to dress. We started off at about 4:30pm. The start was slow and simple. As we continued there was an ascent and at this point I was not sure I was ready. We all started sweating and we were advised to unzip our jackets to regulate temperature. Lawrence says, sweating in the mountain is evil. Why? You may ask. Because as the sweat cools off on the skin, it makes the body colder than it was. We found lemon grass along the way, growing unattended and unbothered. We wished we would be going through the same route. But no, we would use a different route on our way out. The hike was tough for me such that during ascent I did not want to talk. It mostly an ascent. We would take short breaks to rest. I lived for those breaks. All through the three days. At some point it started raining. We geared up for the rain with rain coats and bag covers. We continued with the trek until we got to Lake Ellis close to 7:00 pm. We stayed on one side of the Lake. We are glad we went there because we were about to make a friend. Our Porters were yet to arrive and that means we would not set up the tents since they had them in their luggage. Good enough there was a fire. We needed it badly after being rained on slightly so parts of our day bags, bag covers and rain coats could do with some heat to dry them. This new friend was a porter who was with tourists from Poland. They had used the Kamweti route which I understand is tough to the core. I thought this Chogoria one was the toughest but apparently, I was wrong. Lawrence said he avoids it like plague. Then I knew it was a tough one. They had descended from a higher point since the tourists were overcome by altitude sickness. This was a reminder that none of us was immune to it and that health comes first. His name is John Muriithi AKA Cutasey. He made the evening around the fire ten times better. We sat and stood around the fire with everyone wanting to dry items that were wet and heat up. The Lake was magnificent at night. No explanation here will do it justice. The reflection of the camp lights from the opposite side against the Lake was

wonderful. The moon also showed up. As its reflection hit the lake, the water in the lake seemed to evaporate. That was such a beautiful sight. After some time, our Porters arrived. The Guide coordinated the setting up of the tents. Cutasey entertained us with many stories. His colleagues were with him but he spoke the most. He was very jovial and kind. Everyone liked him. We asked him so many questions about the mountain. He started out as a Porter in 1992. 1990s babies hello?! His experience with the mountain was unmatched. To say it was cold is understatement. To think that Cutasey warned us that where we would camp on day 2 was colder was chilling. He kept laughing when he mentioned Mintos camp. This is where we would camp on day 2. He said the energy we had to talk would be unseen on day 2. Looking back, he was perfectly right. After about one hour we were informed that our tents were ready and tea was ready. We took our items in the tents and had tea. The tea really helped with the cold. We had tea with nicely done pop corns. Spoiling continues. We went back to the fire. Cutasey was like a magnet and as long as he was there we all seemed to go back there. We really enjoyed his company such that after the hike Bryan requested that Robert makes sure to include him in our next hike. Please team give me one month to process before we decide where next. His colleagues left at some point but he stuck there. At around 10:00pm, dinner was ready. Dinner was fried fish fillet, fried potatoes, mixed vegetables and cabbage. You will excuse my elaborate description of food. Food and I are friends and even altitude sickness spared me the lack of appetite symptom. Again, we served and went back to the fire. Cutasey said the mountain life is hard but “*mwanamume lazima atafute, unakaa hapo na mama ukifanya nini?*” It’s how he said that was funnier than what was said. He had educated his children with Porters’ job with another one joining University this month. Once we were done eating, the fire wood was also running out. We said *kwaheri* to Cutasey and went to sleep. I was freezing. The hot water bottle helped a little. It was my first time sleeping in a camp tent and a sleeping bag. I suffered but I was focused on the goal. I got so cold I could almost not feel my toes. Walter came through with his hot water bottle and now I had two in my sleeping bag. That helped, a lot. I slept. At 4:00 am an insect was buzzing around the tent and it woke me up. After that my mind started replaying what had happened on day one so I slept on and off until my alarm rang at 6:00 am.

Day 2: Lake Ellis to Mintos Camp

I woke up once my alarm rang at 6:00am because there is no way I was going to miss the sunrise over Lake Ellis. It was beautiful, really beautiful. I thoroughly enjoyed it though I was not fully rested. I went back to the tent to change clothes. Changing in a tent is an extreme sport. It got better with time though. Make sure you shower properly before starting day one because the next shower will most probably be when you go back home. In the mountain, it's all about wiping and what Kenyans call pass port showers. It ends there and you change into fresh clothes. You would freeze showering I promise you. Actually no one prevents you from showering even though there are no bathrooms but the weather gives you the answer. Breakfast was ready at 7:00am. There was oats porridge and again everyone wanted the recipe. It was really good. There were fruits to start with. As a Nutritionist I clapped about that. The main breakfast was pancakes, fried sweet potatoes, sausage, fried eggs and bread. There was hot water to prepare beverages, that is tea, chocolate or coffee. The options were broad and there was enough of everything. We really needed the energy for this day. It was a long trek and hike to Mintos camp. Once everyone had breakfast and we had finished packing we had a briefing since we missed it the previous day. Lawrence introduced the full team and we introduced ourselves to them. We would be family for the next two days and indeed we were.

We started out at 9:00am. It was a pleasure refilling our water bladders at river Nithi. The water is refreshing to say the least. It is the best I have tasted so far. Cool, unpolluted and untreated, just the way God made it. Perfect! Water is one of the antidotes to altitude sickness. You are advised to keep sipping. To assist in this, one of the key hiking gear items is a water bladder that will have a pipe that can be used anytime without having to open the bag and remove a water bottle. The pipe is directed past the neck to allow for access to the water anytime when hiking. Get one if you plan to hike.

After the water point we started to ascend. It was tough. At this point I was not sure I would sustain this for two more days. I had to relax since I was not forced to come. I desired to come, voluntarily. Was there an option anyway? None, not unless altitude sickness told me to try next time. The good thing with Lawrence is that he gave us many breaks during our ascents. These really helped with acclimatization to the high altitude. We had what he called breather breaks

and long breaks. During the breather breaks we just rested for a minute or so. For the long breaks we snacked. Bryan had a really good snack he had baked and everyone enjoyed it. Mine was enjoyed on my behalf since I could not chew it with braces. This recipe was highly sought out too. It was an energy booster since after they ate it I could see how energetic they were. Snacking is part of long hikes. Carry nuts, biscuits and/or dried fruits. Lawrence knew our bodies were not used to this. I guess he needed the breaks too. He had his hiking bag. The one which for us was to be carried by Porters. Bryan had his too. He was faster than some of us and I could not fathom how. Do we call him team *Subaru*? I guess that fits him. Bryan and Leo never seemed to tire when we were breathing fast. Shirleen and I did not even want any stories during an ascent. We were partners in this. We wanted to conserve any energy left by just 'putting one foot in front of the other'. The men were okay, they would talk during an ascent. Lawrence kept saying: "*pole pole, pole pole*" and that was reassuring for me because a hike is not about speed but endurance. Underline that. If you are to succeed in Mt. Kenya you need lots and lots of endurance to keep going even when you feel like an extra step is hard work. Walter says that you cannot hike Mt. Kenya without a why. I concur. Have a purpose why you want to hike. I shared mine earlier, right? Another one for me was a fitness boost to my body.

For the rest of the day, we trekked and trekked and trekked some more. We stopped somewhere for lunch. Each one of us had packed lunch with some crisps, an apple, boiled egg, a banana, piece of chicken, 4 pieces of bread with peanut butter and honey and a packet of juice. I told you guys, one of the best things in the mountain is the food. Mathenge can really cook. Of course, the Porters assist him especially in meal preparation. Leave alone the Chefs in hotels. This one deserves an award. Carrying cooking supplies and cooking fresh and delicious food in record time. Lawrence advised that this was not the time to try foods that we were intolerant to. He had a bad experience with hiker who decided to try peanut butter when they usually don't take it at home and had a reaction to it. He advised that we take only what our bodies were used to. I particularly enjoyed the chicken piece and the egg and bread with the juice. I wanted to load up on some protein source and energy. Leo admitted he did not feel like eating. Altitude sickness hallo? We encouraged him to bite even if he did not feel like it. He obliged. After the lunch we continued with the trek. We were halfway. Halfway people at 1pm. I remembered my why and we continued. We had such a lively team. No complainer and no demotivator in the team. All optimistic that we would summit and step on point Lenana. I loved the whole team. Totally.

We continued with the hike. At some point we could see Lake Michaelson though it was slightly covered in a cloud. It was majestic. Next time I want to view it in close range. We stopped to wear our rain gear since it started to rain. All geared up we continued in the light rain. I was particularly keen not to be wet since we were assured that there is no fire at Camp Mintos. The wood there causes headache and if anything, fires are discouraged at the mountain. It's only that the night at lake Ellis was really cold but Cutasey made sure the fire was out before we slept. The rain did not continue for long. We trekked for two more hours. The last part of the climb was rocky and a Porter from another group who was behind us kindly supported me up by guiding me on where to step. We finally got to Camp Mintos at 3:00 pm. It was looking dark, you would think it was 6:00pm. I asked Shirleen if the summit path was as rocky and she confirmed it was. I was doomed. She said we would start with a long trek, then the final part to summit would be rocky. I was still determined. Unwaveringly so. I really needed such kind of determination especially for summit day. The camp was extremely cold as Cutasey had promised. We were now at altitude of 3850 metres targeting 4985 metres the following morning.

The Porters had arrived way earlier and had already set up the tents. They were now preparing tea for us. Immediately I got to our tent, just before placing my bag down, nausea kicked in. Fatigue was in high levels too for everyone. I panicked. I just stood there confused wondering whether that means that my hike ended at camp Mintos. I said a silent prayer. I had come so far to turn. I decided to monitor my symptoms and take it an hour at a time. It was a matter of hours before we started our summit push. I got into the tent and shared how I was feeling with Walter. He had a headache too. We decided to take water and rest before tea was ready. Lawrence had said that was a beautiful gorge that we would see once at the camp. We were too tired for that. Only Bryan went. Team *Subaru*, remember? We took a short nap until we were alerted that tea was ready. We took tea hurriedly to find some time to rest. There was tea, pop corn and biscuits. Robert also complained of nausea. We seemed to be hit by the high altitude. It really helped to warm up our bodies. We went back to the tent to change clothes in readiness for summit. After we changed, we slept like the hike was done. Lawrence woke us up at around 7:00pm to alert that dinner was ready. I would have skipped it but my nausea had subsided and I knew I needed energy for summit. We forced ourselves to wake up. The word is forced because the fatigue was heavy. Heavier than the mountain that we intended to summit. As always, the food was on point. There was pumpkin soup. The main meal was rice boiled with some peas, a beef stew and green

vegetables. The beef was soft and yummy just the way I like it. I forced myself to take every bite just for the energy of the summit. Robert tried too. We all ate and that was good.

We planned to wake up at 1:30 am, get ready in one hour and start the summit hike at 2:30am. We wanted to be in time for the sunrise. All hikes will not be the same. A case in point, Robert had hiked Mt. Kenya four times but he had never caught the sunrise. Catching the sunrise was a big deal for him and all of us *monos*. Shirleen decided she had had enough of summits and she would go with the Porters to Camp Shiptons and enjoy the scenery there as they waited for us to descend for breakfast. I felt bad that she was not coming with us but I also understood her. I would be the only lady with the summit team. Sometimes we visit nature hurriedly but it needs time and calmness to soak it in and take the lessons. That is what she was going to do at Shiptons as we pushed our bodies for the summit. I set the alarm for 1:00 am and 1:30 am. The 1:00 am was a preparatory alarm because in my whole life I had never woken up at 1:30 am. This was new and I could not miss the summit because of sleep. My sleep was on and off. Anxiety of the summit kicked in. Would I make it? Would the nausea subside? I prayed about it and tried to sleep. Still slept on and off because the mattress and a sleeping bag are not equal. Don't get too used to your springy and comfortable mattress. Try a sleeping bag once in a while. You will appreciate the mattress ten times when you get back home.

3rd September 2023 Day 3: Camp Mintos-Summit-Camp Shiptons-Old Moses camp

The day was finally here. The long awaited. The summit day. I woke up after the 1:30 am alarm rang. After the 1:00 am one, I just lay there wondering if this was really necessary. I questioned my decision but my determination remained. I woke Walter up and we started to prepare. The camp was covered in ice. It was that cold. Remember we were dressed already so it was a matter of washing the face, soaking our faces in *arimis* and we were done. The *arimis* is meant to prevent cold burn/frostbite due to the cold. A face with cold burn is not pleasant. Our faces looked like those of babies', laughably so. It worked guys. Sunscreen is necessary when the sun is out and sunglasses too. Read about snow blindness. I digress. We were alerted to take a light breakfast. There was tea and biscuits. The 'real' breakfast would be at Shiptons camp after summit. Surprisingly, I woke up feeling very hungry. I guess the day 2 hike used up a lot of energy. I took the tea with biscuits. I must have taken the most biscuits. The other team members

were not bothered, especially Robert who was still feeling nauseated. Everyone took something though. We really needed the energy. We were ready to start. We started the hike at exactly 2:30am. It was a beautiful starry night. Magnificent to say the least. Isn't creation beautiful?! We are eternally grateful to the Creator. The beauty of Mt. Kenya, however rugged, continues to give silent praise to its Creator, Jehovah God. This reminds of Psalms 8:3,4 that says: "When I see your heavens, the works of your fingers, The moon and the stars that you have prepared, What is mortal man that you keep him in mind, And a son of man that you take care of him?"

Really, what are we? But out of undeserved kindness, he considers us and loves us. We owe Him, a lot.

The trek scared me, to the core. As we started off, I had general body weakness. I said a silent prayer. I did not even have the energy to share with anyone. I shared much later. After a few minutes I felt better but not best. At our first breather break, I indulged in dried raisins that I had in my bag. I also took water frequently. The trek had us in a line with our headlights directing where to step, all of us following Lawrence. He informed us that Desmond would join us in the summit to support any of us that would need support. That was the kindest thing I heard that morning. How selfless of Mbugua and Lawrence. We were well taken care of. After the raisins and water, I felt much better. Thank you, Jehovah. I could see hope of summiting. We got to a group that had started before us. It was a big group and their pace was slower. I was tired and very happy that they were slower and we were behind them. Little did I know Lawrence's plan. That we pass them. How now? I felt like joining them. But no, I had to go with my team. One of them signaled the team to stop to allow us to pass. I envied them but I couldn't stop. I am sure they were wondering where we got the energy and courage from. If we passed you at around 3:00 am on 3rd September 2023 along Mintos-Summit route just know I was as afraid as you were. *Sio kiherehere aki*. We had to maintain the pace we had started with and the sunrise was calling us loud. This was surreal, a dream about to come at the break of dawn. Hello Lenana? We are coming. I lived for the breather breaks which we were allowed to request. Walter requested for one. I was happy since I did not even have the energy to talk. I was conserving energy. All of it. Long breaks were not allowed lest we froze. At some point, Robert requested for one too. He was unwell, the nausea again. He sat down on a rock and vomited. I was shocked but apparently that was good. It helped ease the altitude sickness. He had no headache and that was a good sign according to Lawrence. We were all good and we continued. This was a real push. I will not lie

that it was easy but it is darkest before dawn, right? We had two motivators, Leo and Bryan. Bryan sang a short song: “when the going gets tough, the tough gets going”. That helped. Leo kept reminding us that we were almost. He would repeat: “almost there guys, almost.” That was also a boost. I could not even say a word but I was grateful for the words they said. Lawrence kept reminding us “*pole pole, pole pole*”. He would also alert us when breather breaks were almost. He would say: “a breather break is coming up shortly.” That boosted hope and mental energy because really it got mental, as Lita Lewis, a fitness trainer I follow puts it. We were fatigued but this was not the time to stop. My why kept ringing in my mind. It pushed me too. We hiked and hiked some more until day break came. It was humbling. Lawrence kept looking back to ensure we were all okay and following him. We got to the final part that was very rocky. I panicked. Lawrence said, “follow me, step where I step as you hold the rocks”. I did just that and we moved. At this point even looking down was not an option, it was a cliff. Then the rocks needed a lot of caution. We could see point Lenana by now at 6:00 am. That pushed us. We got to a point and Walter just said: “am tired, let’s rest!” and he sat down on a rock. We would laugh about this the whole time descending. Lawrence had no problem as long as the break was short. Leo says Walter was his motivation and Bryan says I was his motivation to push on. The two were my motivation because honestly, where they getting all the energy from. Seems this motivation was a cycle. When you get there, look for your motivation and focus. Walter felt sleepy too. High altitude was catching up. One is not allowed to sleep up there to prevent freezing. The solution is to continue and continue we did after a short break. By now Desmond was just behind us and Lawrence reminded him to support anyone who needed support behind as he dealt with team *Subaru*. We followed Lawrence closely and within no time we got to the final metallic, steady stairs to step on Lenana peak. At this point, I was so overwhelmed by emotions that I was balancing tears. Robert had gone ahead to prepare the camera for the summit photo. As he called my name to capture a photo my emotions were all over and I shed a tear. It was like: WE FINALLY MADE IT, I MADE IT! We were at 4985 metres above sea level. Congratulatory messages were flying left, right and centre. That moment right there 6:40 am of 3rd September 2023 was surreal, a dream come true. We took pictures, several for the memories. As we started out I was not sure I would make it but here we were, here I was at the summit of Mt. Kenya’s third highest peak, Lenana. This is where commoners like us reach. Nelion and Batian peaks are very technical and are summited by people with high expertise in rock climbing. If you ask me, Batian

is a serious risk to life. Lawrence said he had summited Batian which is the highest but it was very tough. It involves touching the cold rocks with bare hands. No gloves like we were using for Lenana. We saw some people attempting to summit Batian as we hiked to summit before dawn. I hope they made it safely. Clearly, we loved the mountain and the mountain loved us back. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity, for the health, for the minimal altitude sickness, for the team, for the guide, Lawrence, for Desmond, for the porters. I do not take anything for granted. Summit was done but we had to come down, right? We did not stay too much at Lenana due to the cold, the high altitude and our time schedule. We stayed for less than 10 minutes. Those minutes were filled with awe that we made it, joy, feeling of achievement and definitely lots of pictures. We then had to start our descent. The other work began here. It was a 3km descent to Shiptons Camp but it looked like 10km. It involved care with steps and for me thoroughly using the trekking pole and following Lawrence guide on where to step. Desmond helped me at some point during descent. Then I guess he figured out the team was strong. They led the way with Robert and we found them at the camp. Robert could not wait to see Shirleen and we understood that. The rest of us took the descent a step at a time. The first to summit was a man who had his guide, then we followed and the group we left behind at 3:00 am came in one by one. We found some along our descent and encouraged them to push on. I hope they all summited. The man got to the peak and he said, he would live there. Descent was tough and I fully understood him. When I saw his guide holding his hand during descent, it was source of motivation since I could use a pole and some guidance here and there. He did not know but he served as my motivation during descent. That kind of “am not that bad, let me push on”. He got to the camp and he slept face up, on a bench. I hope he is okay wherever he is. We passed by Likii River near Shiptons camp and I could not resist a picture, thoroughly smiling because what was that even? The summit was tough but we made it. We got to the camp at 9:30am to find ready breakfast. As usual, it was sumptuous but nausea kicked in again. Just after I had served, including banana fritters which I had not eaten in a long while. But guess what? We had a 16km trek to Old Moses camp and therefore we needed the energy. Again, I forced myself to eat and I was able to finish the meal. I loved the fruits they served. They included tree tomatoes, oranges and passion fruit. There was an animal that was a bit entitled with the orange peels. The rock hyrax, quite a number in the camp. They look like rodents but they are not. They are related to elephants. They were making sounds (read songs) along the way as we began our summit at 2:30

am, sort of wishing us all the best. They are full-time residents of higher altitude areas than any of the other animals on the mountain, being found at nearly 4300m. Their bodies are adapted to live at such heights—in spaces between rocks, as their name suggests. They feed primarily on vegetation. Friendly and welcoming, these rabbit-size mammals have been known to grab food items from tired and unsuspecting hikers! I heard they can bite toes too. I wonder how true that is but they kept eyeing Bryan's toes since he had removed his boots and socks at Shiptons camp. This day we would do a total of 24 kms, 5km from Mintos to Summit, 3kms from Summit to Shiptons and 16kms from Shiptons to Old Moses Camp. We layered down our gear. For me this was especially on the summit pant which has fleece and it really made me sweat during descent and the summit jacket. I retained one jacket. We also refilled our water bladders. Everyone was now okay, happy and satisfied. We were now ready to trek to Old Moses Camp. We trekked as we took a few pictures and had small breaks. We passed through Mackinders Valley. It is an epitome of beauty. Lawrence explained how melting glaciers formed the valley. The valley is named after Halford Mackinder who made the first recorded ascent of Batian(5199m) in 1899. This route to Old Moses Camp has a variety of vegetation that make it a refreshing trek. We kept shifting valleys as the trek continued. We had two major ascents along the 16kms and others were mostly descent and flat terrain. By now I did not want to see any climb, I was over any climb for the next one month. Lawrence kept explaining different plants that we found along the way. I particularly remember *Lobelia deckenii*, *Lobelia telekii* and *Senecio*. Get yourself a guide who does not tell you to google or that he will answer later when you ask a question. And one who knows what to do when you encounter a buffalo, obviously. You are safer and happier that way. We had lunch by the bank of Likii North River. Wonderful memory. Lunch was spaghetti and mixed vegetables stew. We all loved it. There was juice too. By now we were really happy with the Porters' work and they won our heart. If you ever hike and you have Porters please tip them. They risk their lives for you and your hiking expedition. You will find yourself doing it voluntarily though, they can never be paid enough. Their job is not easy but they make hiking comfortable. Simply put, we cannot hike without Guides and Porters. Appreciate them, appreciate the meals. It goes a long way to encourage them.

After lunch we had one ascent and the rest was either a descent or a flat terrain. We were now in three groups, just talking as we did the easy bit of the hike and making sure not to lose sight of Lawrence. Clearly, our hearts were full. When we got close to the weather station, we could see

Old Moses camp and that pushed us to walk, we walked fast. We got to a point where Lawrence said that buffalos were around and we needed to walk close to each other. I did just that, walked close to him. Because I am not risking a buffalo or buffaloes. He showed us their step marks on the ground, looked like a small hole where they had stepped. The final part of the trek was easy, very easy and satisfying. We finally got to Old Moses camp at 4:30pm thoroughly happy though dog-tired. My watch recorded 43000 plus steps, wow! This was quite a day. It started well and ended extremely well. We took a few pictures at the camp. We then boarded the vehicle that was waiting for us to take us to Nanyuki. We exited via Mt. Kenya National Park Sirimon gate and that is how our hike ended. It was a calm and happy drive to Nanyuki town where we would return the hired gear and take a vehicle back to Nairobi. This was done. Well done. End of story.

As narrated by Winnie Wabere-Mmbaya,2023.